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RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8195
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 5769
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001689

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STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID
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KATHMANDU FOR OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WILLIAM BERGER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AORC](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ISSUES PUBLIC STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
UN AT REQUEST OF DONORS

REF: COLOMBO 1652

11. Summary: At the urging of the U.S., EU and UN in Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka issued a public statement on December 15 expressing its "support for, and confidence in, United Nations operations in Sri Lanka" and "the efforts of the international agencies in humanitarian assistance and development work in the country, stating that their efforts have greatly contributed to the welfare of the people of Sri Lanka." Comment: This statement provides a clear message of GSL support that the UN hopes will help reduce difficulties its employees and its field operations are experiencing in exercising their mandate. However, further criticism is likely to be a continuing issue as nationalistic parties such as the JVP and their supporters in Government are skeptical of the motivation of the UN and INGOs who provide humanitarian assistance to conflict victims and other needy residents in LTTE-controlled areas. End Comment and Summary.

12. Reftel reported that relations between the United Nations and the Government of Sri Lanka deteriorated further in the last month as a result of groundless accusations by the JVP that UNICEF had supported the LTTE through contributions of money, food rations and vehicles. In a separate incident, the GSL voiced strong objection to a statement by UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura condemning the Sri Lankan military's attack on the Voice of Tigers (VOT) radio station.

13. At the monthly meeting on December 13 of the Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance chaired by Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Samarasinghe and Defense Secretary Rajapaksa, Ambassador urged that the GSL issue a

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public statement expressing its support for the work of the UN in Sri Lanka. Ambassador noted that that the UNICEF controversy had affected adversely not only UN operations, but also those of international NGOs. He reported that in a meeting on December 12, international NGO representatives had told the Embassy that as a result of the tensions with the UN, Tamil staff of INGOs were being stopped more frequently

at military checkpoints and felt increasingly vulnerable. One NGO reported experiencing difficulties hiring new local staff because of the danger potential recruits felt they might be exposed to. The Ambassador urged that the GSL issue a high-level public statement noting that it had investigated the allegations against UNICEF, found no evidence of wrong-doing, and express its strong support for the work of UN agencies and INGOs in Sri Lanka. EU Head of Mission Wilson and UN Resident Representative Buhne made similar appeals.

¶4. Samarasinghe and Rajapaksa agreed to issue a statement and asked the donors to provide a draft. After an exchange of drafts and comments, the Government issued the following statement on December 15:

Government and International Donors express support for UN operations in Sri Lanka

At the monthly meeting of the Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) chaired by Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe, on Thursday (13 December), the CCHA reiterated its support for, and confidence in, United Nations operations in Sri Lanka. Associated with the Minister at the meeting were heads of UN and multilateral agencies, heads of Diplomatic Missions including US Ambassador Robert Blake representing the Co-Chairs and EU Ambassador Julian Wilson, the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense, Public Security and Law and Order Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and other key government stakeholders.

Minister Samarasinghe stated that the Government, and the CCHA in particular, appreciates the efforts of the international agencies in humanitarian assistance and development work in the country, stating that their efforts

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have greatly contributed to the welfare of the people of Sri Lanka. He stressed, however, that the Government has the right to fully investigate any allegations of misconduct. The CCHA had agreed upon an approach based on the party accused of such misconduct being given the opportunity to put forward its case and that, until all investigations are concluded, parties shall refrain from issuing any public statements. Such an investigation is currently under way to investigate allegations against one Agency and the Government will wait for the outcome of the decision.

The International Donor Members of the CCHA including Ambassadors Blake and Wilson welcomed this expression of support and the government's position on the investigation of allegations. The international donor members also reiterated their full confidence in the UN, Red Cross and I/NGO agencies, their mandates and committed staff members. They pointed out that the programs implemented by the UN are approved by and often implemented with the relevant Government Ministries and district/divisional offices of the Government.

In the collaborative spirit of the CCHA, the Chair on behalf of Government stakeholders and international members decided to place their position before the Sri Lankan public to emphasize the positive and fruitful relationship that exists between Sri Lanka and the UN.

¶5. Comment: This is a welcome statement. It provides a clear message of GSL support that the UN hopes will help reduce difficulties its employees are experiencing in exercising their mandate. This is likely to be a continuing issue, however, as nationalistic parties such as the JVP and their supporters in Government are skeptical of the motivations of the UN and INGOs who provide humanitarian assistance to conflict victims and other needy residents in LTTE-controlled areas. The GSL declined to mention UNICEF in its statement as that investigation is ongoing. UNICEF and the UN vigorously deny any wrong-doing and are confident the

GSL's investigation will conclude the same.
BLAKE